

## **I. Introduction**

Seattle is uniquely situated among the ridges and valleys of the Puget Sound lowlands allowing for spectacular views from the natural geographic features of the Olympic and Cascade Mountain ranges, and the waterways of Puget Sound, Lake Washington and Lake Union. In addition to its natural features, Seattle's urban setting provides spectacular viewsheds of the downtown skyline, historic landmarks, neighborhood architecture and built structures such as the Space Needle and the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

The Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has acquired a wide range of parkland offering public view sites protected under the Master Use permit and the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA). These public viewpoints are currently threatened by development activity. Recent studies have been conducted to inventory park sites, document SEPA designated views, and determine the impacts of development on viewpoints. In addition to the threat of development, there is also a threat of view obstruction by vegetation. DPR has begun the process of evaluating landscape maintenance and management issues to optimize SEPA designated views. The intent is to develop a Vegetation Management Plan applicable to viewpoints it manages providing public view access to the region's natural and built features. The City of Seattle is committed to conservation, and is dedicated to providing a legacy for future generations of residents and visitors by preserving the views and vistas that naturally highlight the unique topography of Seattle.

## **Goals and Objectives**

In finding a balance between natural resource conservation and view preservation, the Department of Parks and Recreation's primary goals for developing a Vegetation Management Plan for viewpoints are:

- to protect designated public views as determined by SEPA guidelines
- to protect steep slopes from erosion and surface water run-off
- to provide maximum native habitat value for wildlife
- to minimize any hazard potential and optimize public safety
- to provide consistent, pragmatic management direction to establish and maintain sustainable vegetation for all viewpoints

As part of the development of the Viewpoints Vegetation Management Plan an extensive review was completed of previous studies and documents. Consistent with preceding and on-going work by the

Department of Parks and Recreation, this plan incorporates practices set forth by Seattle Parks Best Management Practices, adopted Vegetation Management Plans for specific parks with viewpoints issues, and recommendations from maintenance staff.

The Vegetation Management Plan for Viewpoints addresses the following objectives:

- 1) evaluates pre-determined viewpoints to assess current maintenance and management needs;
- 2) categorizes viewpoints based on shared site conditions and maintenance requirements to optimize intended viewsheds;
- 3) develops maintenance prescriptions that can be applied to all sites having similar conditions with consideration given to sustainable management practices;
- 4) defines maintenance practices and the appropriate labor force for each.

### **Viewpoint Site Selection Criteria**

Park sites included in this study provide the basis for developing viewpoint maintenance criteria. Site conditions range from steep hillsides, to shoreline habitats, and to 'pocket' parks adjacent to right-of-ways. View-types also vary from panoramic vistas to framed and secondary views.

A landscape management framework has been established from the evaluation of these diverse sites and conditions. The Vegetation Management Plan will provide the maintenance templates needed to continue viewpoint management over time for all existing viewpoint parks as well as new sites as they are acquired. The 24 parks addressed in this report meet one or more of the following criteria as determined by the Department of Parks and Recreation Urban Forestry Division:

- SEPA view designation with a significant vegetation component affecting current views needing an assessment and a prescription for management and maintenance
- No current plan for landscape maintenance or management in place
- Highly valued property proposed for viewpoint status but not currently designated